

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 2642

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINR MILI EI
SUBJ: OLIVER J FLANAGAN - NEW DEFENSE MINISTER

REF: DUBLIN 2554

1. AS EXPECTED, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR LOCAL GOVERN-
MENT OLIVER J FLANAGAN WAS CONFIRMED BY THE IRISH PARLIAMENT
(DAIL) DECEMBER 15 AS DEFENSE MINISTER. THE POST HAD
BECOME VACANT AS A RESULT OF THE DEMOTION OF FORMER DEFENSE
MINISTER DONEGAN. THE SIX HOUR DEBATE WHICH GREETED PRIME
MINISTER (TAOISEACH) COSGRAVE'S TWO-SENTENCE NOMINATION
ANNOUNCEMENT WAS UNUSUALLY RAUCOUS, EVEN BY IRISH STANDARDS.
OPPOSITION DEPUTIES RAKED UP EVERYTHING THEY COULD AGAINST
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FLANAGAN. DEFENSE SPOKESMAN DOWLING CALLED THE APPOINTMENT
A "SORRY JOKE" AND TERMED FLANAGAN THE "CLOWN PRINCE OF THE
GOVERNMENT". THE TAOISEACH FINALLY CLOSED OFF THE DEBATE,
CALLING IT "A PRE-CHRISTMAS FREE-FOR-ALL".

2. FLANAGAN, 56, IS A VETERAN OF 33 YEARS IN THE DAIL,

AND HIS PERSONAL VOTE IN HIS DISTRICT HAS GENERALLY BEEN THE HIGHEST OF ANY IN THE COUNTRY. HE IS THE EPITOME OF THE BLACKSLAPPING, JOVIAL, LOUD AND BOISTEROUS POLITICIAN WHO TAKES GOOD CARE OF HIS CONSTITUENTS. HE HAS BEEN IN-AND-OUT OF THE FINE GAEL FRONT BENCH SINCE 1952, ALWAYS IN MINOR POSITIONS, AND HAS BEEN A FIRM FRIEND OF PRIME MINISTER COSGRAVE FOR MANY YEARS. THE REASON THAT THIS POWERFUL POLITICIAN HAS NEVER HELD AN IMPORTANT POST BEFORE APPARENTLY STEMS FROM COSGRAVE'S FEELING THAT HE WAS ERRATIC AND HAD SHOWN A PENCHANT FOR IRRESPONSIBLE STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS. FOR INSTANCE, ON TELEVISION IN 1968 FLANAGAN SAID: "I AM A FIRM AND CONVINCED BELIEVER IN JOBBERY...ANY TIME I HEAR OF FIANNA FAIL MINISTERS BEING CRITICIZED FOR PUTTING THEIR FRIENDS INTO JOBS, I AM ANGERED BECAUSE I AM NOT IN THE SAME POSITION TO PUT MY FRIENDS IN JOBS". IDEOLOGICALLY FLANAGAN IS EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE - PERHAPS REACTIONARY WOULD BE A BETTER TERM. THE PAPERS OFTEN CALL HIM THE SOUTH'S ANSWER TO IAN PAISLEY.

3. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE MILITARY ARE NOT TOO HAPPY OVER THIS APPOINTMENT, BUT EVERYONE IS WILLING TO GIVE FLANAGAN A CHANCE. HE IS CUT MUCH IN THE MOLD OF HIS PREDECESSOR, ALTHOUGH PERHAPS NOT AS SHREWD OR INTELLIGENT. HIS UN-ASSAILABLE POLITICAL POSITION AUGURS WELL FOR CONTINUED INCREASES IN DEFENSE SPENDING. SINCE IRISH DEFENSE MINISTERS ARE SELDOM CALLED UPON TO LEAVE THE ISLAND OR TAKE PART IN MULTILATERAL DEFENSE AFFAIRS, FLANAGAN'S PROVINCIALISM WILL NOT BE AS MUCH OF A HANDICAP AS IT WOULD BE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. CURLEY

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